

## THE CROSS: A POINT OF TRANSFORMATION? (A REFLECTION)

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### Introduction

Man has not been prodigiously provided for by nature; on account of it man struggles to bridge the gap between him and other animals or more precisely primates by developing culture. This is why we hold that culture is exclusively a human phenomenon. Man can think of culture because nature endowed him with the power of speech and gave him a chemical laboratory known as the mind. Man is a mystery. A psychology school of thoughts (1985) writes.

you certainly are wonderful, and should be full of amazement at the potential within you. You have a wonderful body with five wonderful senses. A body which works automatically according to the original idea that set in motion, so long as you allow it to do so.

This school continues:

A wonderful mind, with the power to think whatever you choose to think. A mind which has the power to interfere with the original idea, therefore, it must be some part of that same original idea. (p. 21).

It is a truism that the mind has a kind of influence on the body. This is a pointer to the fact that the spiritual supports and determines the physical. We have many a time heard many say that thinking makes a man - i.e. Allen in *As A Man Thinketh*, Napoleon Hill in *Think and Grow Rich*, other writers on power of auto suggestion, etc. Allen (n.d) said:

Man is a growth by law, and not a creation by artifice and cause and effect is as absolute and undeviating in the hidden realm of thought as in the world of visible and material things (p. 12).

He continues: ... man is the master of thought, the moulder of character, and the maker and shaper of condition, environment and destiny."(p.14)

This shows that the aphorism 'as a man thinketh in his heart so is he' for Allen:

Not only embraces the whole of a man's being, but is so comprehensive as to reach out to every condition and circumstance his life. (p.11)

Knowledge is power has been assigned to Bacon but I add 'use' of knowledge is power. This knowledge comes about when consciousness encounters reality. I do not want to sink myself into the rationalist cum empiricist controversy, thanks to Kant for his mediation. My attention is drawn to the arch empiricist David Hume who denied the self of course on account of his disregard for metaphysics, he did say that all works on metaphysics should be thrown to the flames as they are meaningless. He denied the self thus:

For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or another, of heat and cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never catch myself at anytime without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception. <sup>4</sup>

According to Locke and true to fact, man acquires knowledge through sensation and more so reflection. I reiterate that information is not knowledge: but reflection on this information could give rise to knowledge, for it is reflective of human activity, the primary act of consciousness.

Many of us still do not seem to agree that concept is different from idea but I still maintain that both are not the same. There is no doubt that abstraction generalization, classification and concept are interrelated words. A name given to any general element in our experience is known as concept. Social science research council (1954) holds that:

A concept is a mental construction, an abstract idea that refers either to a class of phenomena or to certain aspects of characteristics that a range of phenomena have in common. (p. 25-26)

In short, concepts ... are abstractions from reality, designating types of movements, persons, behaviour, or other classes of phenomena (p. 91)

While an idea suggests a picture in the mind; an opinion; a kind of (appreciation of something) understanding; feeling; suggestion, etc. Man experiences nature and reality. This experience is at various levels: physical, mental and spiritual. Life is about experience; and philosophy is an interpretation of human experience. Why? It is due to the fact that no philosophy as Ogugua(1994) states is positionless", as no philosophy is presuppositionless. Philosophy which sprang up from wonderment can be comfortably located between religion and science. For Okoh, J. (2001) Experience does not constitute philosophy. He states:

The conceptual schemes that constitutes philosophy through intellectualization cannot be seen on the platform of existence without the ground-files of cultural expetience',(p.16)

Usually in life ideas arise when man experience reality and reflects on it. For some people ideas are seedlings of impressions, spring from impressions. Why? It is simply due to the fact that the human mind captures the forms and manifestations of nature with ideas. And to each of these experiences man strives to attach meanings, even the prehistoric man or the savage made attempts to explain phenomena he experienced. We usually say that we know from the known to the unknown, as such nothing which commands our attention is not interrogated, explained to the best of our ability.

At times in life, there are objects, which depicts ideas not of themselves but of other things to us. By implication, they represent other things; such objects act as signs and a s such as symbols. These symbols are results of suggestion at the level of nature and convention depicting natural and artificial symbols. Natural symbols usually are generally accepted by mankind as they relate to common human experiences i.e. dark cloud associated with storm, smoke associated with fire, etc. Artificial symbols are contextualized and have meaning within a society and for some people.

Artificial symbols may pass into oblivion, either due to the dropping of beliefs, need for change, or even extermination of a group, sect, etc which recognizes or knows such symbols. Robin Thompson (1975) writes.

Conversely, natural symbols persist, since they are rooted in some phenomenon of nature which men of each century perceive more or less alike. The interpretation of the symbol may alter, namely, there may come about an elaboration of the ideas it represents, but it will continue to be related to the original conception had by men". (p.4)

At this point, it becomes necessary to ask what is a symbol? Etymologically, for Chevalier et.al

(1986) symbol has multiple origins from *symbollo*, *symbolon*; *symbollein*; *symbole*. This is not our preoccupation here. Simply put, each symbol is a total world (p.24) of its own; as it is not easily definable as it breaks all established barriers only to unite the extremes. It is seen and regarded in many quarters as a conventional sign and not a natural one. For Ukaegbu (1991):

Symbol is a conventional and not natural signal in the form of word, a thing or action with which any given human community expresses and communicates ideas and values in such a way that in the normal course' of events, attention given to the symbol is an indirect. way of making contact with the reality that is symbolized.(p.24)

It has intuited universal meaning for Ogugua (2003). According to Ricoeur (1925) it is: Any structure of signification in which a direct primary, literal meaning designates, in addition, another meaning which is indirect, secondary and figurative, and which can be apprehended only through the first'.(p.69)

Do you now see that symbols are not created arbitrarily the way signs can be? For Nwaorgu(2001) "A symbol is something we can perceive and with which we can connect a meaning or significance.(p.1) There is a natural closeness between symbols and interpretation. Symbols hide and reveal reality at the same time. Oququa(2003) poignantly stated:

That simply means symbols are characterized by 'opacity' and 'equivocity'. The great profundity of symbols is expected by its opaqueness, the depth of symbols demands an interpretation(p.13)

It is pertinent to point out that sign is not symbol, and type is not symbol too. According to Williams a sign may mean a visible mark intended to communicate a message or meaning." as in Gen. 4:15 or even a reminder as in Gen. 9:12. Sign is certainly a means of recognition, having 1: 1 kind of relationship with reality. Symbol has multiple relationship, hence is multi-referential. As sign points to something, symbol directs our (manner of) thought about the thing in question. With regard to types, all types are symbols, but not every symbol is a type; by implication, symbol is a wider concept than type. As symbol is more of suggestion, thought, idea of an object or reality ( a suggestive sign), used in multiple realms of existence, type is more of a true picture of what it prefigures and usually used in the realm of religion alone. We can rightly hold that a type remain a matrix within a matrix (symbol).

History, in all its stages, has recorded innumerable cases of symbols and types. Some of these are more unique, remarkable, spectacular than others. Some are remarkable still within the sphere of the remarkable. In 'our context, we are concerned with the cross, which is an eternal symbol. We have over 385 kinds of cross, yet the cross of Jesus Christ is the most unique, pronounced and most remarkable. This is the cross that changed the human condition saddled with sin and made man a new creature. This is the cross which, though over two thousand years old, is still self-asserting and thought-provoking. It is indeed, the cross, a cross of crosses. There must be something essentially, intrinsically and peculiarly mysterious about this cross. It is the intention of this paper, to throw enlightening light on this remarkable cross.

### **Origin of Cross**

The truth is that cross is prehistoric, not endemic to any known civilization, hence could be

traced back to remotest antiquity.

Going memory lane one could easily decipher that the cross suggested to the primitive mind, the idea of duality, which has remained the most fundamental lesson(s) of existence. There is oscillation from one pole to the other, life and death, day and night, permanence and change, male and female, pain and pleasure, etc.

Existence to man is either a flux between these poles, most often difficult to determine which extreme holds sway or is most efficacious. For Thompson (1975): Not only were such conditions contraries, but they seemed to parallel each other in their potentiality of accomplishment . (p.4)

What does the statement of Parmenides that being is one, and that of Heraclitus that everything changes, mean to you? Are any of these wholistically correct? It does seem that reality reflects both of them, for as the intrinsic nature of something remains unchanged in self, the appearance of that self might change. So an ideal state would be one where both change and permanence mitigate each other, that is rhyme in unity. If we use lines to represent contraries, and single one (line) represents the generation of one contrary, and another an Opposite manifestation, these lines of (assumed) equal length will denote equality. If these lines cross each other, they have not lost their identity; you can see they have united and make a sense or meaning; thus cross then depicts a harmony of the contraries.

One could argue philosophically that there are not opposites, that everything is related to everything else as they are in one continuous motion. The unity of the lines discussed above, cannot be seen as contraries when in fact or not; for our mind cannot and does not conceive these conditions as contraries. What we discern as opposite may be due to the absence of a positive reality or presence of a negative fact. The meeting point of former lines simply symbolizes the unity of the lines. This unity can be understood through reflection. Lama Anagarika Govinda(1977) holds:

Change your awareness, and live in a different world, experience a different reality! The ability to change one's awareness appears only at a certain stage of reflective and creative consciousness which does not let exist in animal and is only partially developed in man. (p. 41).

Through creative imagination which is different from aimless day dreaming, phantasies, one gives new values to life "Creative imagination builds with the "bricks of reality", as does the artist with the material of the physical world and the potentialities of his psyche" (p.18) so said Govinda.

It is with the power Of creative imaginative that man can create a new reality and even transform his inner as well as the outer world. Is it surprising that Bronowski Jacob in a speech to the American Academy of Arts and Letters stated:

The power that man has over nature and himself lies in his command of imaginary experience. Almost everything we do that is worth doing is done first in the mind's eye. The richness of human life is that we have many lives. We live the events that do not happen (and some that cannot) as vividly as these that do. Do you now realize that every cross is contextual? All crosses do not have the same origin; or natural, or psychological,

or religious foundation.

Originally there was a cross of crosses. The Bible states, the Lamb of God was slain before the foundation of the world was laid. Could you sense the 'cross' in the love between the father and the son that gave rise to the Holy Spirit? Is it possible for you to sense the 'cross' in Genesis account of creation as the Spirit of God hovered over the waters; as the Spirit imbued the water with power? There was a 'cross' as the spiritual passed through the physical, a reaction took place. Do you know that life is 'cross' and nothing else? As God sent Lucifer out of heaven there was a cross as Lucifer left heaven, he Lucifer crossed the boundary of heaven, and resides in the preternatural sphere. When God made man in His image and likeness, there was a 'cross'. The Bible says God made him from the dust of earth and breathed in him the breath of life. In breathing into him (Adam) the spiritual crossed the physical and there was life. Even when Satan (Lucifer) in form of the serpent deceived Eve and Adam there was a 'cross' movement from the preternatural to the natural. And when Adam and Eve fell, they equally crossed from light into darkness. Life is all about cross. For in marriage too there is a cross, the man leaves his father and mother and goes to his wife and the two become one flesh. More precisely during intercourse, the flesh of the husband crosses the flesh of the wife, the water and blood of both cross and eventually their spirits cross, the culmination of which is a 'being with spirit, soul and body. What else do you need to know that life is cross and cross is life?

Apart from cross being associated with life, there are crosses which are products of convention. Many crosses have heraldic, mystical and religious significance, these are related to the psychological principles on which the need for the crosses anchored.

Here in context, we are going to describe or examine only four kinds of cross in the light of Thompson (1975). The Chaldaeo - Assyrians had the equilateral cross as a symbol of the sky and its god 'Anu', it suggested a radiation of space, extension and direction. For the Pre- Columbian Indian and the Incas of Peru, they used a cross; within a square, with the earth stretching in four directions.

There is 'crux ansata' which is a two cross with a handle attached to its top. It has a romantic and mysterious origin and history; used by kings on persons of the gods or goddesses. To Egyptians this kind of cross is called 'ankh' meaning 'life' it suggests a kind of immortality, as he who has the 'ankh' could be said to give life to others or to increase the life force of others. This 'ankh' was placed in the hands of gods and personages to show that they were living, not perhaps in the physical sense, but that they were living in the next world.(p.6). So kissing the cross is seen as key to life as recorded about King Useraten III who goddess Anukit was portrayed as saying to him with cross close to his nostrils "I give thee life, stability, purity, like Ra, eternally".

There is the 'crux gammata' or swastika hitherto, venerated by people but presently under disrupt. It has appeared on things people used in some kingdoms i.e. jewellery, pottery, weapons, etc. of the Gallic Athenian, Rhodes, and Scandinavians people. In India, 'swastika' cross has two arms one pointing right and the other pointing left. The Hindu regard 'swastika' as the positive or male principle of the universe; while 'sauvistika' the cross with arms turning left as the negative or female principle of the universe associated with the god Ganesa and the goddess Kali respectively. They associate creative activity, light and life with 'swastika' and

night and destruction with 'sauvstika'. For the Chinese, swatika' symbolizes long life, abundance, richness and plurality. For them, it symbolizes the number 10,000. Hatred associated with this cross is yet to be eradicated from the minds of many people. Centrally this cross presents to the mind an idea of motion, movement, action and development within man and within nature too.

Now let us look into the origin of some Christian crosses. The Christian cross began with the Roman cross; usually called 'lignum infelix' - unhappy wood. It was a wooden post with a horizontal crossbeam near the top. Upon it, criminals were executed as was then customary. On this kind of cross Jesus Christ was crucified, and as such it became the Christian symbol of faith, symbolizing an infamous wrong and the sacrifice of Jesus. Since then for the ignorant Christians it has remained a sort of magical item, an amulet. Little wonder, one theologian stated the cross has received worship similar to, if not equal to that of Christ". Many who think themselves learned err in thinking that keeping of cross in the houses, carrying them about is a kind of idolatry. I think idolatry has nothing to do with an object rather the use; moreso, replacing the reality with an image, in short, worshiping of the object.

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With time the 'crux imissa' - Latin cross replaced the Roman cross and became a symbol of Christianity. Other crosses i.e. 'crux decussata' Sf. Andrew's cross in form of the letter X, 'maltese cross' - Rayed cross, usually used by hospitals; patricial cross, named after bishops abound. An opinion tend to see the cross mounted on steps as Calvary cross.

There is the Rosicrucian cross; this is not a Christian cross. Theirs is a cross with a rose placed in the exact centre of the cross where the two lines intersect, depicting as they hold the point of unity. This cross for them according to Thompson (1975)" has a distinctly mystical and allegorical meaning, unique unto itself".(p.7) They allude that the point of unity is where the material and spiritual conditions meet for a common purpose. A crucial question is, is it so? It cannot be so. Having X-rayed the evolution of the cross so far, let us now focus on the cross, the cross of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the king of the Jews (INRI)

### **The Cross-of Jesus**

The cross of Jesus Christ is a mystery. So the caption of this sub-theme could equally read 'the mystery of the cross'. What then is mystery? We are not going to dabble into theology because it is a theological term, commonplace understanding of it will suffice. According to Oxford Advanced Learners English Dictionary (1977), it is "something of which the cause or origin is hidden or impossible to understand" (p.567)

For Longmans Dictionary of Contemporary English (1979) it is something, which cannot be explained or understood; a strange secret nature or quality; a religious teaching or belief that is beyond human understanding or that is kept secret "(721) Scholastic theology distinguishes between mysteries in the absolute sense and in the wide sense. The former are not understood in their essence even though revealed, and the latter are inaccessible to man unless made known to him through revelation.

Why talk of mysteries even in this age of scientific overhauling of values? We must forever talk of mystery because God is incomprehensible. *Sacrementum Mundi* attests: The essential and permanent incomprehensibility of God precisely as such must be the real reason why there is

such a thing as mystery (or mysteries) (p.134)

It is a mystery for the finite to know the infinite, or even for the mental to know the physical. This is why the process of knowledge whereby an object becomes intra- mental, an object-in-the mind is seen as mysterious. In the same manner, it is difficult or mysterious for us to understand God. Aquinas has this to say "man's utmost knowledge of God is that we do not know him" This calls for the necessity of revelation. Or else why did Vatican Council attest: ... the existence of mystery (that of God and of his free action in regard to man) is the reason why revelation as such is necessary.(p.134)

By and through revelation we know something about God, that does not mean we understand in to hidden things of god. Now having looked at the concept of mystery let us examine the mystery of the cross. The mystery of the cross, is the mystery of the Godhead, mystery of the incarnation (mystery of God taking flesh), mystery of the humility of God, a humility which the most sharp witted, intelligent man cannot apprehend. This is the God which no one has seen as in (Jl 1:18,6:46,4:20), the God whose face nobody can see and remain alive, that being Moses in spite of his spiritual height saw only his back who told Moses His name is 'I AM'. The God who lives in unapproachable light as in 1 Tim 6: 16; whose free action in regard to man is a mystery (Mk 4: 11; II Cor. 2:7). Nobody can know this mystery which is mysteriously mystifying save God himself. *Sacrementum Mundi* writes: Because of what God is, it is evident that his incomprehensibility essentially belongs to him and is not something which ceases with the beautiful vision".(p.133)

It is the mystery of the foolishness of God, self sacrifice of God, mystery of the death of God- the source of life. The mystery of the cross is tied to that of incarnation. In the vision of God, God had already died before he (God) took flesh. Think about this, the lamb that was slain before the foundation of the world. That means there was no flesh then; both fresh and man were in potency (in the mind of God). The birth of Jesus was radical was contrary to the norm, of the man going into his wife; this radical deviation is forever unique. Likewise the death of Jesus on the cross was unique, it was the first-time and the only time God died (of course God cannot die). Closely linked to this is the duo nature Of Jesus, he combined the human and divine natures. As a man, he hung on the cross, died, but as God he conquered death.

### **The Cross as Transformation**

With the presence of Jesus, and by the authority of God the Father, the cross which was once the sign of crime, evil and weakness, was transformed. The cross till present remains the strange paradox at the centre of Christian faith. The cross is life and life is cross. Without one the other does not exist, in short, has no possibility of existing (remember the biblical passage, the lamb slain at the foundation of the world). Okolo, C. B.(1992) writes:

Crosses as suffering, pains, sicknesses, death, etc have been the lot of man since at least the fall of our first parents. For the consequences of that great fall as decreed by God in Genesis are loud and clear. (p.7)

The spectre of evil and suffering characteristic of the human 'condition haunts man. Little wonder, Paul John Paul II stated: Within each form of suffering endured by man and at the same time at the basis of the whole world of suffering, there inevitably arises the question, why? .(p.7)

All these questions led Christ Jesus to depict the cross as an indispensable, remarkable mark of discipleship. He said if any man would come after me ... , let him take up his cross daily and follow me (Matt 16:24). Is it surprising then that Jesus Christ emptied Himself of the glory of Godship and took flesh. He condescended and lived like this creature, not that alone, but the sinless being, took the load of human sin, that is a great cross; for cross has to do with self-denial. Philippians 2:6- 11 says Jesus

who being in the very nature of God did not consider equality with God as something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant being made in human likeness and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death even death on a cross.

Do you know that the "lignum infelix " - the unhappy wood is only a fulfillment? John the Baptist on sighting Jesus Christ while he (John) was baptizing people at Jordan said behold the lamb of God, He that takes away the sins of the world. A question is, how is he to take away these sins? By the way of the cross. Questions about the vicissitude of life led to the crucifix, that is, Jesus Christ on the cross. The cross since then has remained the key to fathoming the mysteries of life, man and God. With Christ Jesus on the cross, Gal 3:13 was overtaken and changed. It reads: accused is he who hangs on a tree. The tree of Jesus Christ is connected with the fact of man's sin, with the human condition and predicament. Adesina (1988) stressed:

Thus the root of sin lies in man's proud claim to be independent of God, the God to whom he owes his very life, and ultimately it becomes the attitude of deliberate rebellion against God and His laws(p.5)

It was because man was in a desperate plight, separated from God although apart from God he can do nothing. The Bible did not say very little but nothing. He is spiritually dead, held tight by the power of evil.

The cross shows the grace of God, love of God in action. It not only showed the waiting on God to die by men, but equally the waiting of God, the powerful God agreeing to be powerless. To understand what we mean by waiting, let us see the position of Henri Nouwen(2002)

Active waiting implies being fully present to the moment with the conviction that something is happening where we are and that we want to be present to it. A waiting person is someone who is present to the moment, believing that this moment is the moment. (p.79)

Our waiting is not the same as the waiting of God, ours is entangled, we think and strategize on how to control the future but Christ's (God's) is different, involving docility, affirmation of what was about to happen, acceptance of what was about to happen; something happening to him over which he has no control.

The waiting of God is agony, it is passion, it is an activity never passive. Jesus fulfilled his ministry by doing what God sent him to do , and by allowing things happen to him (be done to him) by mere creatures (The powerless doing something on the all powerful). In short, it involves man deciding how God will be God and seeing if He could still be God and cease to be God. The waiting of God involves: The agony of being out of control and of having to wait. It is the agony of God who depends on us to decide how to live out divine presence among us .(p.89)



The cross of Jesus and the crosses on Calvary point towards great lesson; that all actions end in passion; that once we are handed over we wait and things happen unto us. The cross of the thief by the left side of Jesus represents the path to waywardness; the incorrigible, the wicked, the fool and the condemned. Not necessarily those condemned by God but those who willingly took to walk the path of perdition. It is the cross of rebellion. And many walk this path today in life, they rebel against self, others, and God. The other cross by the right side of Jesus, points towards repentance. Many equally seek peace and solace at the foot of Jesus today. The two thieves were on the same platform, they were condemned but one referred to as the good thief was saved and not the other. Why? It is due to the fact that the cross is that of activity, that of grace, life and mercy but one must make move unto God like the prodigal son. These two crosses depict our human condition. Then the cross of Jesus Christ is the cross of redemption, encapsulating the mysteries of God's love, work, friendship and the mystery of community.

The cross of Jesus is connected with man's sin. Jesus Christ was lifted on the cross as a passive victim depicting that the cross is a sign of hope; overcoming of death. On the cross of Jesus humanity was divinized, for the Scripture called us adopted sons of God because of the person of Jesus Christ. The life of Jesus suggests to us that not being in control is part of the human condition; and that in the midst of worldly struggle, pains, sufferings, in the very act of waiting we experience the resurrection although 'poco a poco'.

On the cross the awful climax was reached; Christ Jesus became one with the entire human race. He did not die On Our behalf rather he died in Our place; and broke through the darkness generated by sin, for the contraries, grace, goodness, life, and sin, death, darkness to mitigate each other and in such a meet, the superior force will transform the other. None of the contraries loses its identity but the meet brings about change. Or else why did the Bible say in John 12:31-32,

The time of judgment for the world has come - and the time when Satan, the prince of this world, shall be cast out. And when I am lifted up (on the cross), I will draw everyone to me.

The cross is the foundation of life in every sense of it. It was there from the beginning and will continue to be there, for it is life and life itself is cross. The cross is at the foundation of life for it is at the root of freedom; the gospel of John says you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free. The cross brought to fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 4:18-19 that captives shall be released, the down trodden freed, and that God is ready to give blessings to all who come to him.

Waiting is dependent on life, and since life is cross, if waiting according to Simone Weil is the foundation of the spiritual life, then the cross is a sure foundation of the spiritual life, for without self-denial nobody can serve God let alone become his disciple; for he hinted, to serve me and follow me you must take up your cross. By implication, you must live the human condition; wait in expectation desire to be transformed.

The cross though a paradox, a sign of contradiction is equally a sign of hope and a point of transformation.

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